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St. Helena

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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I. General

1. The Territory of St. Helena,[1] which is administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, consists of the main island of St. Helena and two dependencies: the island of Ascension and a group of islands forming the dependency of Tristan da Cunha.

2. Situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately 1,900 kilometres from Angola and 2,900 kilometres from Brazil, the Territory covers a total land area of 412 square kilometres. Ascension lies 1,200 kilometres to the north-west of St. Helena, and Tristan da Cunha and the other small islands forming that dependency are approximately 2,400 kilometres to the south of it. St. Helena, where Jamestown, the capital of the Territory, is located, is the largest island, with an area of 122 square kilometres. It has a tropical climate tempered by trade winds which blow throughout the year.

3. According to the most recent information provided by the administering Power, the population of St. Helena, excluding its dependencies, was 5,131 at the end of 1995. Approximately one third reside at Jamestown. The next largest communities are situated at Longwood, in the east of the island, and at Half Tree Hollow, in the north-west. The remainder of the population live in small cottage communities or single cottages.

II. Constitutional and political developments

4. Information on constitutional and political developments in St. Helena is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 4-9). The administering Power informed the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session in October 1996 that it had noted various statements made by members of the Legislative Council about the Constitution and was prepared to discuss them further with the people of St. Helena, and further noted that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had recently sent a delegation to study the Constitution and its application with the Legislative Council of the island.

5. During the debates in the House of Commons on 22 January 1997, some members of Parliament raised questions about the imbalance of power existing on the island between the Governor and the Legislative Council. According to their statements, existing problems related to St. Helena's economic and political development would be adequately addressed if the elected officials of the Legislative Council had more say in matters affecting the island. Members of Parliament specifically discussed the problem of rising unemployment, which was said to have reached about 18 per cent in 1996. Among the other issues discussed in the House of Commons were citizenship, transportation, fishing and prospects of tourism on St. Helena. It was emphasized during the debates that the island should be encouraged towards self-sufficiency, local control and self-government.[2]

6. In his statement to the House of Commons on the same day, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Nicholas Bonsor, stated that the administering Power's commitment to St. Helena was evidenced in its aid support, which was more than 8 million pounds sterling annually. He also said that private sector development and public sector reform were the keys to the island's future. The administering Power was negotiating an important three-year country policy plan with the St. Helena Government. The basis for the agreement was the St. Helena Government's strategic review, which had been completed in 1996. The country plan, according to the Minister, would commit the Overseas Development Administration to a substantial aid package spread over the next three years, which would give St. Helena more responsibility for its own affairs. He concluded by saying that his Government would look with great sympathy at any proposals by the islanders for constitutional change.[3]

7. On 13 March 1997 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office reported that the first St. Helena Business Forum took place at the Foreign Office, which brought together businessmen, officials and outside experts to explore development possibilities on St. Helena. One of the aims of the Forum was to examine how St. Helena could become economically self-sufficient.[4]

8. It was reported in early April 1997 that a police van and a bus were set on fire on the island on 2 April, and on 8 April two of the legislative Council's members resigned. A St. Helena official stated that the resignations had created tension in the Council, but that the situation on the island was calm. It was reported that the main complaint among the population of St. Helena was unemployment. Some islanders believed that the level of unemployment was too high while unemployment benefits were too low.[5] According to information provided by the administering Power, the Council would be dissolved in early June 1997. The Governor announced his decision to call elections in July, which had been scheduled for November 1997, following a request from Councillors.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

9. St. Helena possesses few natural resources. Agriculture, largely of a subsistence nature, is the main economic activity in St. Helena. Food production is insufficient to supply the island's needs, and this, together with the lack of manufacturing industries, results in the importation of the vast majority of its requirements. The cost of living in St. Helena is higher than in the United Kingdom owing to costs related to the remoteness of the island. The retail price index in February 1996 was 105.22, compared with 100 in November 1994. There is no value-added tax.

B. Public finance

10. The main items of estimated revenue, including British Government grant-in-aid, and expenditure for 1994 to 1996 were as shown in table 1.

11. Information on taxes is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, para. 12).

12. The Territory's statement of assets and liabilities as at 31 March 1996 was as shown in table 2.

C. Development projects

13. Information on development projects in St. Helena, including the project implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, is contained in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 14-18; A/AC.109/2043, paras. 10-11). Estimated development aid expenditure for the period from 1994 to 1996 is shown in table 3.

D. Agriculture, land tenure and livestock

14. Information on agriculture, land tenure and livestock is provided in a previous working paper (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 19-28).

15. Only small quantities of forestry and agricultural produce are exported from St. Helena. During 1995/96, 3.5 cubic metres of treated posts were exported to Ascencion and approximately 3.9 tons of coffee (valued at £39,867) were exported to the United Kingdom. The high price from a luxury niche market in the United Kingdom has stimulated renewed efforts to increase coffee production on the island.

16. The Agriculture and Forestry Department provides support to smallholder producers, including agricultural loans, through a revolving credit fund, which provided loans totalling £5,895 in 1995.

17. In 1992 an agricultural water subsidy programme was introduced to reduce the impact on farmers of a considerable increase in the prices charged by the Government for water. During 1995/96, £5,517 was spent on a water subsidy, which represents about 61,747 cubic metres of water used for irrigation.

18. The number of employees involved in agricultural and livestock services totalled 36, and the estimated expenditure during 1995/96 was £820,307.

19. St. Helena has an environmental conservation programme aimed at conserving endangered endemic species and diversity of the habitats. The endemic plants that are unique to St. Helena form an important part of St. Helena's heritage. Concerted efforts are being made to ensure their survival and conservation. During 1995/96, 2,766 of the various endemic plants were planted on the island.

E. Fisheries

20. Information on fisheries is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 29-33).

21. Employees at the St. Helena Fisheries Corporation during 1995/96 consisted of 18 workers, excluding fishermen.

22. Local fish sales and export statistics are shown in table 4.

23. During 1995/96 the St. Helena Fisheries Corporation completed part of its export and marketing project, which involved upgrading of processing areas, port harvest support and overseas training of its managerial staff.

F. Industries

24. There is no large-scale industry on St. Helena. All crafts are practised on a cottage-industry basis, with technical, financial and marketing facilities provided by the Government through the St. Helena Development Agency, established in 1995.

Table 1. Revenues and expenditures, 1994-1996

(Thousands of St. Helena pounds)[a]

	1994/95	1995/96
Revenues		
Direct taxes	716.8	759.5
Indirect taxes	1 088.4	1 164.4
Fines, fees and charges	207.3	189.6
Government rents and hires	112.9	131.7
Earnings of the Government	196.5	164.2
Treasury receipts	1 305.2	1 746.2
Other	2 604.2	2 743.4
Total ordinary revenue	6 231.3	6 899.0
Grant-in-aid	3 225.0	3 560.0
Total	**9 456.3**	**10 459.0**
Expenditures		
Government	1 364.9	1 336.1
Finance and development	804.4	822.3
Pensions and gratuities	314.8	295.3
Public education	1 105.5	1 207.8
Public health	1 360.9	1 362.5
Social services	1 125.3	1 246.1
Agriculture and forestry	793.3	836.6
Public works	2 903.1	3 013.4
Public debt	–	289.3
Other	41.4	49.4
Total	**9 813.6**	**10 458.8**

[a] The local currency is the St. Helena pound, which is equivalent to the United Kingdom pound sterling. Both St. Helena currency notes, introduced in 1976, and the United Kingdom pound sterling are legal tender.

Table 2. Assets and liabilities

(St. Helena pounds)

Liabilities		*Assets*	
Deposits	1 219 208	Cash held locally by Ascension and Crown Agents, London	3 061 440
Special funds			
Savings bank	9 345 772	Savings bank	8 185 516
Other funds	1 157 679	Other funds	835 205
Consolidated fund	740 109	Development fund	(42 153)
		Advances	422 760
Total	**12 462 768**		**12 462 768**

Table 3. Estimated development aid expenditure, 1994-1996

(Thousands of St. Helena pounds)

	Approved total grant		*Expenditures*	
Projects	*1994/95*	*1995/96*	*1994/95*	*1995/96*
Agriculture and forestry	1 452.7	1 452.7	191.1	152.0
Public utilities	3 875.4	1 847.8	502.9	246.4
Fisheries	283,30	283.3	200.0	36.0
Social and administrative services	4 935.0	3 319.0	252.0	64.5
Administrative and miscellaneous services	50,00	50.0	50.0	50.0
Other	190,00	–	163.9	–
Total	**10 786.4**	**6 952.8**	**135.9**	**548.9**

Table 4. Local fish sales and exports

	Local sales		*Exports*	
Year	*Tons*	*Value (pounds sterling)*	*Tons*	*Value (pounds sterling)*
1988/89	116.98	115 805	92.46	88 057
1989/90	109.80	121 522	154.54	128 124
1990/91	83.21	108 406	154.53	128 124
1991/92	88.91	118 782	26.66	38 399
1992/93	69.66	108 364	87.06	115 056
1993/94	68.93	107 516	168.85	189 593
1994/95	70.73	108 950	150.35	178 447
1995/96	162.48	123 034	199.95	276 922

G. Transport, communications and utilities

25. Information on transport, communications and utilities is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 35-37). The island has over 100 kilometres of surfaced roads. During the period under review, approximately 1.2 kilometres of road was constructed.

26. During 1995/96, a total of 344,888 cubic metres of treated and untreated water were supplied for domestic, commercial and agricultural purposes.

27. Electricity for the Territory is supplied by the Energy Division of the Public Works and Services Department, which employed more than 270 workers in 1995/96. The Department's annual expenditure is £2.6 million, and it receives income of £1.6 million through the sale of power, water and services. Expenditure on development aid work in 1995/96, with support from the Overseas Development Administration, totalled approximately £0.2 million. In 1995/96, a total of 6,278,478 kilowatt-hours were generated and an additional 115 consumers were connected to the island's power supply system, bringing the total to 2,263.

H. Banking and credit

28. Information on banking and credit is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 38-39). Local currency in circulation as at 31 March 1996 was £2,975,030, comprising £2,600,970 in notes and £374,060 in coins.

I. International trade

29. St. Helena's main imports are food products and tobacco, motor spirits and fuel oil, animal feed, building materials, motor vehicles, machinery and spare parts. Its only exports are fish, handicrafts and coffee. Its main trading partners remain the United Kingdom and South Africa. Others include Brazil and Ascension.

IV. Social conditions

30. Information on social conditions in the Territory is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 41-53).

31. According to the administering Power, 526 St. Helenians were employed as of March 1996 on Ascension, 238 on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) and 147 in the United Kingdom, for tours of one to two years.

32. According to the administering Power, recurrent public health expenditure in 1995/96 was £1,351,393. There are six rural health clinics on the island. A total of 1,237 people were admitted to hospital during the period from 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996. During that period the hospital performed 91 major and 180 minor operations.

33. At the end of March 1996, 502 needy persons received income-related benefit payments in the form of cash issues varying from £18.95 to £37.40 per week. A home help scheme, launched in 1981, at the end of March 1996 employed 66 women. In addition, an unemployment allowance varying from £12.50 upwards is payable.

34. There are 12 public schools in the Territory. The number of teachers in 1996 was 120, 2 of whom were St. Helenians. In 1995/96, school enrolment totalled 1,117 (1,110 indigenous). Total expenditure on education in 1995/96 was £1,228,057, which constituted over 11 per cent of total government expenditure.

V. Dependencies of St. Helena

35. Information on dependencies of St. Helena and the island Tristan da Cunha for the period ending in 1995, and the island of Ascension for the period ending in 1988, is contained in previous working papers on St. Helena prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2043, paras. 31-40, and A/AC.109/1071, paras. 119-129). No further information on them has been received by the Secretariat since that time.

VI. Future status of the Territory

36. In his statement before Fourth Committee on 9 October 1996,[6] during the general debate on the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the representative of the United Kingdom stated that the United Kingdom, which had 10 dependent Territories, remained firmly committed to the principle of self-determination, reflecting the wishes of the people concerned and exercised in accordance with the other principles and rights set out in the Charter of the United Nations, as well as other treaty obligations. He further stated that the United Kingdom had a good record on decolonization and continued to take very seriously its

obligations under the Charter in that connection. It regularly transmitted information on the Territories to the Committee, as required by Article 73 *e* of the Charter. He also said that within the constraints of treaty obligations, his country remained firmly committed to ensuring, in cooperation with the locally elected Governments, that the constitutional frameworks of its dependent Territories continued to meet the interests and wishes of their peoples.

37. On 27 March 1997, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 51/224, a consolidated resolution on 11 Non-Self-Governing Territories, section IX of which was specifically devoted to St. Helena.

Notes

[1] Information regarding St. Helena has been derived from a report transmitted to the Secretary-General by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations on 2 October 1996.

[2] United Kingdom, House of Commons *Official Report*, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), vol. 288, No. 47, 22 January 1997, cols. 893-909.

[3] Ibid., cols. 909-912.

[4] Information provided by the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations in April 1997.

[5] *Reuters*, 15 April 1997.

[6] A/C.4/51/SR.4, paras. 59-60.